

The Hereafter is the Focus

Description: An explanation of hadith no. 40 from An-Nawawi's Forty Hadith. Be in this world as if you were only passing through.

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On the authority of Ibn Umar, who said: The Messenger of God (peace be upon him) took hold of my shoulder and said, "Be in the world as if you were a stranger or a traveler along a path." And Ibn Umar would say, "If you survive till the late afternoon, do not expect [to be alive in] the morning. If you survive till the morning, do not expect [to be alive in] the late afternoon. Take from your health for your sickness and from your life for your death."

This is a hadith from among a collection of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, compiled



by Imam An-Nawawi. It is a famous and well-studied collection of forty-two hadith, and its value lies in the fact that all the hadith in this collection cover a fundamental aspect of the religion of Islam. This particular hadith defines what a believer's attitude towards the worldly life should be.

Background

This hadith is narrated to us by Ibn Umar, the son of Umar ibn al-Khattab. He was very young when his father converted to Islam and thus learned Islam from the very best of the Muslims. He grew up to be very knowledgeable in the fields of hadith and Islamic law. He was known to be a prolific narrator of hadith and is said to have been extremely careful about what he narrated. This hadith gives us the opportunity to understand how the first generations of Muslims understood Prophet Muhammad's teachings. Ibn Umar himself also explains the hadith further.

Throughout the Quran, there are many verses that compare the worldly life with the Hereafter. Predominantly we are told that this life is temporary, and the life of the Hereafter is permanent. We are exhorted to realize that the amount of time we spend in this world is so minute we will look back on it as if it was something that took place in the space of just a few hours. The Quran also tells us that this life is nothing more than an amusement or a diversion.

"...You prefer the life of this world although the Hereafter is better and more lasting." (Quran 87:16-17)

"And the life of this world is nothing but play and amusement, but the Home in the Hereafter is far better is for those who are pious. Will you not then understand?" (Quran 6:32)

The Purpose of this world

Throughout the history of Islam, there are people who have taken this hadith to mean that this life is something to be endured. They think that there is a conflict between this life and the next. This could not be further from the truth. We are here in this world in order to experience trials and tests that prepare us for the final destination. This world is, in fact, a tool that we can use to strengthen our claim to a place in Paradise. This world is also given to us as a trust. We are responsible for its upkeep. We are guardians over its treasures.

Therefore, while we are in this world, we are supposed to be doing two things, worshipping God and looking after our temporary abode. If our lives are guided by revelation and we perform our tasks with good intentions, our lives become worship.

Pleasing God in this life is the gateway to much pleasure and joy in this world. We must not go to either extreme, such as shunning the life we have been given here or becoming too attached to tools we are given in order to navigate its pathways.

Guidelines

1. Be a stranger in this world. This is one of the two choices or levels Prophet Muhammad gives us to help us learn how to be in this world. A stranger in a land always longs for his home and is usually preparing, either in his mind or his actions to return to his original place or hometown. He looks different from the people around him. Similarly, a believer feels that he is a stranger in a strange land. He feels that he is in a place where he does not belong. This is not his home, and he cannot feel entirely happy here; he, looks, feels, and acts differently from those around him; those who only care about this life and worldly matters. He rids himself of the yearning of this materialistic world, a world where some people do not care about the spiritual aspects and the Hereafter.
2. Be a traveler. This is a higher level than the stranger. While a stranger can live and settle in a place, a traveler has no intention of doing this. A traveler is someone who knows he will be walking a path for a predetermined amount of time and will eventually return to his home. He wants to be unencumbered by possessions that will weigh him

down and prevent him from completing his journey. His course is set, and he stops only to provide himself with what is necessary for him to complete the journey. The traveler must also make sure he is traveling on the right path and is accompanied by like-minded companions.

Ibn Umar gives us good advice in the last part of the hadith. He tells to prepare for the future, the future that will be upon us in the twinkling of an eye. We might be hail and healthy at this point in our lives, but this will not always be the case. Therefore, it is better to perform good deeds and do actions that bring us closer to God before our health or our minds begin to deteriorate, and we no longer have the strength. Similarly, we must perform good deeds before death overtakes us, and we do not have the ability or opportunity to do so. Thus, we must utilize our time and do beneficial things. We must not waste our years of good health by gathering materialistic goods or being beguiled by the life of this world.

Removing the life of this world from our hearts is not always an easy thing to do; for some of us it requires a lifelong daily struggle. The world has changed over the in the last fifteen centuries, however, the state of humankind has not. In the past a wise believer encouraged the people around him to remove their love for this world from their hearts. His advice is still relevant today.

‘Remove the dunya (life of this world) from your heart and place it in your hand or your pocket. Then it will not harm you.’

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