

Chapter 7

Analysis of Hadiths on Remembrance of Death

Introduction

Islam has some principles called '*mu'ayyidāt*' (religious sanctions) which are fortress and pillars of the religion that provides maintenance of religious life. These principles must be active in order Islam be effective in people's life. The first principle is 'commanding what is good and prohibiting what is evil'. Commanding and promoting words, actions and conducts that are compatible with Islam; prohibiting people from sins and haram as well as all kind of deeds and conducts that are unacceptable by God.

Raqāiq, which can be translated as the matters that are related to death and what is beyond of it, constitutes the other important part of religious sanctions. The life in grave, resurrection after death, being called for accounting in Judgment Day, divine scale, divine bridge, Paradise, Hell etc. are the topics of *raqāiq*. Studying or remembering these topics strengthen faith, encourage people to moral conducts, create sensitivity in the hearts towards religious matters and love to God. They soften the hearts and cause to eyes to shed tears.

The Companions and early Muslims paid great attention to the topics of *raqāiq* and produced many valuable works in this field. There is a section called *riqāq* (pl. *raqāiq*) in hadith books which covers the advises of the Prophet, Companions and Successors concerning worship, denouncing the worldly pleasures, reliance on God, humility and trials of the world. They elaborated the topics such as the state of a person when he/she meets the angel of death, experience of giving soul in the moment of death, burying the deceases, life and punishment in grave, resurrection, accounting and person's final destination in either paradise or Hell. Besides these topics, they often talked about remembrance of death and brought attentions to the necessity of preparations for the Afterlife.

Remembrance is the connection between two things. Remembrance of death is keeping the reality of death constantly in mind and living life connected with the Afterlife. With this thought, Believers know that this world is temporary and it is like a guesthouse. In order to achieve eternal bliss and happiness they pay great attention to religious life and do not have long projects concerning this world. In many occasions, the Qur'an reminds people the reality of death:

“Every soul is bound to taste death. So (O people) you will but be repaid in full on the Day of Resurrection (for whatever you have done in the world). Whoever is spared the Fire and admitted into Paradise has indeed prospered and triumphed. (Know that) the present, worldly life is nothing but a transient enjoyment of delusion.”²⁸⁷

“We never granted everlasting life to any human being before you (O Messenger); so, if you die, will they live forever? Every soul (person) is bound to taste death, and We try you through the bad and the good things (of life) by way of testing (so that your real character and rank may reveal itself). In fact, you are on the way to return to Us, (to finally be brought to Our Presence).”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Qur'an 3: 185.

²⁸⁸ Qur'an 21: 34-35.

“You will surely die (one day), and surely they (too) will die. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will stand in the Presence of your Lord as litigants.”²⁸⁹

“With God alone rests the knowledge of the Last Hour (when it will come). He sends down rain (just at the time and place He alone knows), and He alone knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will reap tomorrow, and no soul knows in what place it will die. Surely God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.”²⁹⁰

“O you who believe! Let not your wealth nor your children (distract and) divert you from the remembrance of God. Those who do so, they are the losers. So, spend (in God’s cause and for the needy) out of whatever We provide for you before death comes to any of you and he says: ‘My Lord! If only You would grant me respite for a short while, so that I may give alms, and be one of the righteous!’ But never will God grant respite to a soul when its appointed term has come. God is fully aware of all that you do.”²⁹¹

“When death comes to one of them, and then he implores: ‘My Lord! Please, let me return to life, that I may act righteously with respect to whatever I have left undone in the world.’ No, never! It is merely a word that he utters over and over again. Before those (who are dead) is an intermediate world (of the grave, where they will stay) until the Day when they will be raised up. Then, when the Trumpet (of Resurrection) is blown, there will no longer be any ties of kinship among them (which will be of any avail), nor will they ask about one another (as everyone will be too engrossed in their own plight to think of others). (Balances are set up) and those whose scales (of good deeds) are heavy – they are the prosperous. While those whose scales (of good deeds) are light – they will be those who have ruined their own selves, in Hell abiding. The Fire will scorch their faces, their lips being displaced and their jaws protruding. ‘Were not My Revelations recited to you, and you used to deny them?’ They will say: ‘Our Lord! Our wretchedness (which we ourselves provoked upon ourselves) prevailed over us, and we were people lost in error.’ ‘Our Lord! Take us out of this (suffering). Then, if we ever revert to evil, we will indeed be wrongdoers.’ ‘Away with you into it! No longer address Me!’ There was among My servants a party who would pray, ‘Our Lord! We have believed, so forgive us, and have mercy on us, for You are the Best of the merciful.’ You used to take them in mockery, so much so that your hostilities to them caused you to forget My remembrance, and you simply persisted in laughing at them. But look, today I have rewarded them for what they endured patiently, so that they are those who are the triumphant. (God) says: ‘For how many years did you stay on earth?’ They say: ‘We stayed for a day or part of a day. Ask of those who are able to keep count of this.’ Says He: ‘You stayed but for a short while, if only you had known (how short it was to be and acted accordingly)!’ Or did you think that We created you in vain, and that you should devote all your time to play and entertainment, and that you would not be brought back to Us?”²⁹²

²⁸⁹ Qur’ān 39: 30-31.

²⁹⁰ Qur’ān 31: 34.

²⁹¹ Qur’ān 63: 9-11.

²⁹² Qur’ān 23: 99-115.

“Has not the time yet come for those who believe that their hearts should soften with humility and submit (to God to strive in His cause) in the face of God’s Remembrance (the Qur’an) and what has come down of the truth (the Divine teachings)?”²⁹³

Believing in the Afterlife is very important pillar of Islamic faith for it brings harmony and peace to society. If a person knows that, he/she will die and then will be called for accounting they cannot do wrong or injustice to others. Moral conducts and ethical values develop on the basis of belief in the Afterlife. With this notion and conscious individuals constitute happy family, society and nation.

Mischiefs and corruptions of humanity can be prevented by believing in afterlife. Similarly, youth live moral life with this belief. The elders can see the death as the retirement from the works and struggling of this world with this faith and do not lose their hope from God’s mercy. The children can be happy with the belief of Paradise and endure patiently when they lose the beloved ones. Sahl bin Sa’d reports;

“The Prophet (pbuh) was informed about a young boy who secluded himself and was constantly crying. The Prophet went his home. When he entered, he stood up with joy by seeing the Prophet at his home and hugged him. However, shortly after he fell down. He passed away. The Prophet’s eyes were wet. He said; ‘prepare your brother for funeral services. The fear of Hell stopped his heart. By God who holds my soul in His hand, God will protect him from Hell.’”²⁹⁴

Indeed, the Qur’ān declares that whoever fears God and live his life accordingly he will be safe in the Afterlife;

“But as for him who lived in awe of his Lord, being ever conscious of His seeing him and of the standing before Him (in the Hereafter), and held back his carnal soul from lusts and caprices, surely Paradise will be his (final) refuge.”²⁹⁵

Among people there are many patients who are inflicted with various diseases. The belief in the Afterlife gives strength in their hearts so they endure it patiently. However, if they are deprived of this nothing would make them happy. With this notion, their pains and sufferings will be eased and lessened. They will not be scared even the death would be imminent; rather they even may be happy for death is meeting with the beloved Lord according to their belief. For this reason, the saints and pious people smile to the face of angel of death when they give their souls.

Once A’isha wanted to pray for the Prophet to be cured from his illness and started to recite some supplications by holding his hand. However, the Prophet pulled his hand back saying; ‘O God, your exalted friendship is my desire’.²⁹⁶ Indeed, one night he called his freed slave Abū Muwayhiba and said; “my Lord ordered me to ask forgiveness for the people of the cemetery”. Then they walked to Baqī cemetery. The Prophet greeted the people in the graves as; “peace be upon the inhabitants of this city (graveyard) from among the Believers and the

²⁹³ Qur’ān 57: 16.

²⁹⁴ Ali al-Muttaqi, *Kanz al-Ummal*, vol.3, 283.

²⁹⁵ Qur’ān 79: 40-41.

²⁹⁶ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Maghāzī, 84.

Muslims, and may God have mercy on those who have gone ahead of us, and those who come later on, and we shall, God willing, join you”.²⁹⁷

The Prophet mentioned to Abū Muwayhiba about turmoils like waves of darkest night, the one following hard upon the other, each worse than the last and said; “I have been offered the keys of the treasuries of this world and immortality therein followed by Paradise, and I have been given the choice between that and meeting my Lord in Paradise.” Abū Muwayhiba astonishingly said; “may my father and mother be ransom for you! Take the keys of the treasuries of this world and the eternity in it and then the Paradise.” The Prophet replied; “no by God! I have chosen the meeting of my Lord and the Paradise.”²⁹⁸ After that, he prayed for forgiveness for the people of the Baqī and returned to his home.²⁹⁹

One more time he addressed his Companions and said; “there is a servant amongst you, whom God has offered the choice between this world and that which is with Him, and the servant has chosen that which is with God.”³⁰⁰ Lastly, the Prophet said on his pulpit; “I go before you, and I am your witness. By God, I see my Pool in the Paradise from here where now I stand. I fear not for you that you will associate partners to God; but I fear for you this world, lest you seek to rival one another in worldly gains.”³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Salah*, 2127.

²⁹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, vol.5 p.243.

²⁹⁹ Tabarī, *Tārikh*, vol.3 p. 190.

³⁰⁰ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, *Manāqib al-Ansār*, 45.

³⁰¹ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, vol.4 1795.

Hadiths on Remembrance of Death and Their Analyses

First hadith

وعن ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما قال: أَخَذَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِمَنْكِبِي فَقَالَ: كُنْ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَأَنَّكَ غَرِيبٌ أَوْ عَابِرُ سَبِيلٍ وَكَانَ ابْنُ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا يَقُولُ: إِذَا أَمْسَيْتَ، فَلَا تَنْتَظِرِ الصَّبَاحَ، وَإِذَا أَصْبَحْتَ، فَلَا تَنْتَظِرِ الْمَسَاءَ، وَخُذْ مِنْ صِحَّتِكَ لِمَرَضِكَ وَمِنْ حَيَاتِكَ لِمَوْتِكَ

Abdullah bin ‘Umar reported; “Messenger of God took hold of my shoulders and said, ‘be in the world like a stranger or a wayfarer.’” Ibn ‘Umar used to say; ‘When you survive till the evening do not expect to live until the morning; and when you survive till the morning do not expect to live until the evening. While in good health do good deeds before you fall sick; and while you are alive do good deeds before death strikes.’”³⁰²

The analysis of the hadith

Bukhari accepted this hadith authentic according to his hadith criteria and recorded it in his *sahīh* collection. Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah also reported it in their Sunan collections. The Companion who was advised by the Prophet to be like a stranger or a wayfarer in the world is Abdullah ibn ‘Umar. This world is temporary and people are like wayfarers here. The Prophet reminds this fact so Believers do not be deluded with the beauties of this world.

A stranger often remembers his own country or city and wants to meet with his beloved ones. The infinite life and eternal bliss with the beloved ones for Believers is in the Afterlife. Therefore, they should not forget this fact and be deceived with the tricks of Satan. A stranger may like to live in a foreign land. This may cause him to forget his original home and the beloved ones. Similarly, people may forget the fact that they are travellers in this world and their real home is in the otherworld. Loving this world too much develops in the hearts the desire for long life and this desire may cause to ignore the fact of death and the preparations for it. They might be obsessed with the worldly pleasures and always seek to means to live longer to have more fun. In order to benefit from this world in the best manner the reality of death should be remembered frequently.

In the Islamic view, material is deemed as a means to achieve noble goals and therefore this world is not Satan’s property and the body is surely not his home.³⁰³ Islam introduces this world with its three aspects. Said Nursī explains it as follows:

“The world has three facets or aspects. The first facet is concerned with Almighty God’s Names and shows their inscriptions and activity; it mirrors them. This facet is the Eternally Besought’s collection of innumerable letters. Therefore, it is extremely beautiful and worthy of love. The second facet relates to the Hereafter. It is the field to sow for the Hereafter, the tillage of Paradise, the flowerbed of Divine Mercy. Like

³⁰² Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Riqāq, 3; Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Zuhd, 25.

³⁰³ Recep Dogan, “The Position of Human Being in the Universe according to Islam” in “Sociology and Anthropology” Journal, 1(3): 141-148, 2013.

the first one, it is beautiful and worthy of love. The third facet is a veil of heedlessness, a plaything for human fancy and desire. The Qur'an praises creation and attaches importance to it due to the first two facets of the world, but warns people against the third facet."³⁰⁴

The life in this world is the field to sow for the Hereafter and the tillage of Paradise. In order to achieve the eternal happiness in the temporary worldly life people should remember the reality of death and prepare for it. Abdullah ibn 'Umar lived his life according to the advice of the Prophet and encouraged others saying: 'when you survive till the evening do not expect to live until the morning; and when you survive till the morning do not expect to live until the evening. While in good health do good deeds before you fall sick; and while you are alive do good deeds before death strikes.'

Second hadith

وعنه أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: مَا حَقُّ أَمْرِيءِ مُسْلِمٍ لَهُ شَيْءٌ يُوصِي فِيهِ. بَيْتُ اللَّيْلَتَيْنِ إِلَّا وَوَصِيَّتُهُ مَكْتُوبَةٌ عِنْدَهُ

وفي روايةٍ لمسلمٍ: بَيْتُ ثَلَاثِ لَيَالٍ قَالَ ابْنُ عُمَرَ: مَا مَرَّتْ عَلَيَّ لَيْلَةٌ مُنْذُ سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ ذَلِكَ إِلَّا وَعِنْدِي وَصِيَّتِي

Abdullah bin 'Umar reports that Messenger of God said; "It is the duty of a Muslim who has something which is to be given as a bequest not to have it for two nights without executing a written will."³⁰⁵

In the narration of Muslim, it is narrated as 'three nights'. Ibn 'Umar said; "Since I heard the Messenger of God say this, I have never spent a night without having my will with me."³⁰⁶

The analysis of the hadith

This hadith is authentic according to hadith criteria of Bukhari and Muslim. They agreed on its authenticity and recorded it in their *saḥīḥ* collections. Other well-known hadith scholars such as Abū Dāwud, Tirmidhi, Nasāī and ibn Mājah also recorded it in their Sunan collections.

The ultimate goal of Believers is meeting with their Lord free from any debt or rights. They should clean themselves from sins and the rights of others. The best way to actualize this is the remembrance of death all the time. If one desires to meet with God, he must solve himself from the rights of God as well as from the rights of people. Even they must free themselves from the rights of animals by taking care of them well and not doing wrong to them in any way. Especially, if they have debt it is better for them to have written will indicating the payment behalf on them in case if they die.

³⁰⁴ Said Nursī, *the Words*, New Jersey: Light Inc., 2010, p. 623.

³⁰⁵ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, Wasayā, 1: Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, Wasiyya, 1.

³⁰⁶ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ* Wasiyya, 4.

Commentary on Unforgettable Hadiths of Prophet Muhammad

One should write his obligations to God in his written will as well as his responsibilities to people such as debt, deposit, trust, business transactions etc. Additionally, in order to gain rewards after death one may bequest one third of his wealth to be given as charity. They may indicate in their will where this should be spent.³⁰⁷ However, there is no bequest for legal heirs because Islam already determined their share in the inheritance.

Writing a will is considered as preparation to death in mentality. This conduct motivates its doer to do other righteous deeds. Carnal desires and temptations of Satan can be prevented by the awareness to the reality of death. However, most of the people postpone their good deeds to later thinking they would live long. But, there is no guarantee if they would even see the next day live. Writing a will may be postponed with the same delusion. Thus, Believers should be ready for death by writing their will in advance. For this reason, Ibn ‘Umar said that ‘since I heard the Messenger of God saying this, I have never spent a night without having my will with me.’

³⁰⁷ There are various views on will among the legal schools, for further information please refer to Ibn Hajar, *Fatḥ al-Bari*, vol.4, pp264-267; Ali al-Qāri, *Mirqāt al-Mafatih*, ol.3, p. 397; Munawi, *Fayz al-Qadir*, vol.5, p. 441.