**MISERLINESS, GENEROSITY AND ALTRUISM**



**4.37. Those who act meanly (in spending out of what God has granted them) and urge others to be mean, and conceal the things God has granted them out of His bounty (such as wealth or knowledge, and certain truths in their Book). We have prepared for (such) unbelievers a shameful, humiliating punishment.(1)**



**2.272. (O Messenger! Your mission is to communicate all such commandments, so) it is not your duty to secure their guidance (in every matter); but God guides whomever He wills. (O people,) whatever good you spend (in charity and other good causes) is to your own benefit, and (as believers) you do not spend but in search of God's "Face" (seeking to be worthy of His approval). Whatever good you spend will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged.(2)**



**2.274. Those who spend their wealth night and day, secretly and in public, their reward is with their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve.(3)**

**HADITH**

**282. Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Allah the Almighty says, ‘Son of Adam, spend and you will be spent on.’” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Tafsir as-Surah, 11/2; Sahih Muslim, Zakah, 36).(4)**

**283. Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that a man asked the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, “Which aspect of Islam is best?” He said, “To give food and to give the greeting to those you know and those you do not know.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Iman, 6; Sahih Muslim, Iman, 63).(5)**

**287. Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Sadaqa does not decrease wealth in any way, and for pardoning someone Allah only increases a servant in might, and no one is humble without Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, elevating him.” (Sahih Muslim, Birr, 69).(6)**

**MISERLINESS, GENEROSITY AND ALTRUISM**

**It is related that Abu Hurayra said that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said: “There is never a day wherein the servants (of Allah) get up in the morning, but are not visited by two angels. One of them says: ‘O Allah, give him more who spends (for the sake of Allah)’, and the other says: ‘O Allah, bring destruction to one who withholds.’” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Zakah, 27; Sahih Muslim, Zakah, 57).**

 1. In the Qur’an, which Allah has sent as the “prescription” for humanity’s salvation, Allah places great emphasis on generosity and its benefits. It is declared, for instance: Those who act meanly (in spending out of what Allah has granted them) and urge others to be mean, and conceal the things Allah has granted them out of His bounty (such as wealth or knowledge, and certain truths in their Book). We have prepared for (such) unbelievers a shameful, humiliating punishment. (an-Nisa 4:37) It can be understood from the verse that Allah has placed meanness among the attributes of unbelievers and has declared that its outcome is a debasing punishment. 19 Refer to Unit Twelve for further information regarding the narrator Abu Hurayra.  As narrated by Adi ibn Hatim, the Messenger of Allah, upon him be peace and blessings, said: “So whoever among you can protect himself from the Fire, even with half a date, let him do so.” Spending from the bounties that Allah has favored us with in consideration of His approval and good pleasure is elemental. Allah’s Messenger informs us that spending done in this way is among the causes delivering a human being from the Fire.

2. As can be gleaned from the hadith in question, miserliness is also not without is consequence. However, what needs to be pointed out at this juncture is that the wealth that is cursed is the wealth of which the prescribed annual alms are not given. Such destruction and ruin is not asked upon those who are lax with respect to supererogatory goodness. The word *khalaf* mentioned in the hadith comes to mean that which is given, or received, in place of, or in exchange for, another thing. This takes the form of wealth in this world and rewards in the Hereafter. This is the meaning illustrated in the verse, “*Whatever you spend (in Allah’s cause and in alms), He will replace it*” (Saba 34:39). *Talaf* implies physical or immaterial ruin, loss, dissipation, or destruction. It is again declared in a Qur’anic verse: “*Those who spend their wealth night and day, secretly and in public, their reward is with their Lord, and they will have no fear, nor will they grieve*” (al-Baqarah 2:274).

Abu Bakr gave away in charity, at a stroke, the forty thousand dinars in his possession, keeping nothing back*—*ten thousand at night, ten thousand during the day, ten thousand in secret, ten thousand in public*—*such that it is said that this verse was revealed in relation to him. When Ali possessed nothing other than four dirhams, he gave away all of these, one by night, one by day, the third secretly and the fourth openly. When the Prophet asked him why he had done so, he replied, “In order to be merit my Lord’s words.” Upon this, Allah’s Messenger affirmed that he had.

3. Again, with respect to altruism, the highest level of generosity, it has been stated: “*And (indeed) they prefer them over themselves, even though poverty be their own lot*” (al-Hashr 59:9). As is evident in the verse above, altruism refers to preferring the needs of another to one’s own needs, even if one is in more need themselves.

4. Allah’s Messenger was the most generous of people. He himself stated: “The generous are near to Allah, near to Paradise, and near to people, and distant from Hell. The miserly, however, are distant from Allah, distant from Paradise, and distant from human beings, but near to Hell.” The best of humankind in terms of his life and outward appearance (*ahsan an-nas*), the Prophet was the most generous of people (*ajwad an-nas*) in heart and giving to others. A great many hearts unable to be unlocked with the keys of tenderness and other lofty feelings were opened to him with the key of generosity. Safwan ibn Umayya was one of these: “Anas reports that when the Messenger of Allah was on his way to Hunayn, he had borrowed some weapons from Safwan ibn Umayya. As Allah’s Messenger inspected the war spoils he noticed Safwan gazing upon the herds that were crowding around him in bewilderment and said that Safwan could have as many camels as he wanted. Allah’s Messenger continued giving to Safwan until Safwan was astounded by such generosity. With a heart that was filled with abhorrence of the Prophet, Safwan had changed at once. Indeed, this generosity caused Safwan to abandon his hatred and Allah’s Messenger thus became the dearest of people to him. Winning over Safwan’s heart was of course more precious than thousands of camels and cattle. This generosity shown towards him was not in vain. Safwan immediately ran to his people and announced: ‘O my people! Accept Islam without hesitation, for Muhammad gives in such a way that only one who has no fear of poverty and relies fully on Allah can give!’ Such generosity was enough to guide Safwan and his people, who had been among the bitterest enemies of Islam until just before that day, to the truth.”

**ALLAH GIVES TEN FOR ONE**

A beggar wanted something from Ali. The latter then instructed one of his sons, Hasan or Husayn, saying, “Go to your mother and bring one of the six dirhams that I gave to her.” Upon his return, his son said, “My mother said that she is withholding these to buy flour.” Ali then replied, “A person cannot be said to have truly believed until they trust in Allah more than they trust in whatever they have. Go and bring all of that money.” Fatima subsequently sent the money in its entirety. Ali then gave all of it to the beggar. Scarcely a few minutes had passed when a camel trader arrived. Upon learning that the camel trader was selling the camel for one hundred and forty dirhams, Ali asked if he could purchase the animal on credit. The seller agreed, tethered his camel there and left. A short while later, another man arrived and offered to buy the camel from Ali for two hundred dirhams. After paying his creditor the one hundred and forty dirhams, Ali went home and gave his wife Fatima the balance of sixty dirhams, from whom he had only earlier taken six dirhams. When she inquired in astonishment as to what these were for, Ali replied, “It is the result of Allah’s promise, through Allah’s Messenger, ‘*Whoever comes to Allah with a good deed will have ten times as much*’” (al-An’am 6:160).

**LESSONS FROM THE HADITH**

1. Good is never left unrewarded.

2. Close-fistedness and sullenness is to no avail.

3. The wealth of the well to do, who do not pay their prescribed annual alms despite their affluence, is deserving of ruin and destruction.

4. The angels too entreat Allah. That their supplication is answered is demonstrated in the hadith, “When one of you says, *Amin*, as do the angels in the heaven, and they coincide with one another, he will be forgiven his past sins.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Bad al-khalq, 7) (7)

# PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)

# His Generosity

The Messenger is the most polished mirror in which God’s Names and Attributes are reflected to the highest degree. As the perfect manifestation of these Names and Attributes, an embodiment of the Qur’an and Islam, he is the greatest and most decisive and comprehensive proof of God’s Existence and Unity, and of the truth of Islam and the Qur’an. Those who saw him remembered God automatically. Each of his virtues reflected a Name or Attribute of God, and is a proof of his Prophethood. Like his mildness and forbearance, his generosity is another dimension of his excellent, matchless personality, a reflection and proof of his Prophethood.

The people of Arabia were renowned for their generosity even in pre-Islamic times. When we look at that era’s poetry, we see that the Arabs were proud of their generosity. However, their generosity was not for the sake of God or for an altruistic motive; rather, it was the cause of self-pride. But the Messenger’s generosity was purely for God’s sake. He never mentioned, and did not like to have mentioned, it. When a poet praised him for his generosity, he attributed whatever good he had or did to God. He never attributed his virtues and good deeds to himself.

The Messenger liked to distribute whatever he had. He engaged in trade until his Prophethood, and had considerable wealth. Afterwards, he and his wealthy wife Khadija spent everything in the way of God. When Khadija died, there was no money for her burial shroud. The Messenger had to borrow money to bury his own wife, the first person to embrace Islam and its first supporter. [1]

If the Messenger had desired, he could have been the richest man in Makka. But he rejected such offers without a second thought. Although God mandated that one-fifth of all war spoils should be at the Messenger’s free disposal, he never spent it on himself or his family. He and his family lived austerely and survived on scanty provisions, for he always gave preference to others. For example, his share of the spoils of Hunayn was of 40,000 sheep, 24,000 camels, and 16 tons of silver. Safwan ibn Umayya, from whom the Messenger had borrowed some weapons, gazed upon the spoils with greed and bewilderment. Aware of this, the Messenger gave him as many camels as he wanted. Astounded with such generosity, Safwan ran to his people and announced: “O my people! Accept Islam without hesitation, for Muhammad gives in such a way that only one who has no fear of poverty and relies fully on God can give!” Such generosity was enough to guide Safwan and his people, who had been among the bitterest enemies of Islam until just before that day, to the truth. [2]

The Messenger regarded himself a traveler in this world. Once he said: “What connection do I have with this world? I am like a traveler who takes shade under a tree and then continues on his way.” According to him, the world is like a tree under which people are shaded. No one can live forever, so people must prepare here for the second part of the journey, which will end either in Paradise or Hell.

The Messenger was sent to guide people to truth. Therefore, he spent his life and his possessions to this end. Once ‘Umar saw him lying on a rough mat and wept. When the Messenger asked him why he was weeping, ‘Umar replied: “O Messenger of God, while kings sleep in soft feather beds, you lie on a rough mat. You are the Messenger of God, and as such deserve an easy life more than anyone else.” The Messenger answered: “Don’t you agree that the luxuries of the world should be theirs, and that those of the Hereafter should be ours?” [3]

Islam does not approve of monastic life. It came to secure justice and human well-being, but warns against over-indulgence. Thus many Muslims have chosen an ascetic life. Although individual Muslims generally became rich after the Messenger passed away, others like Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Ali preferred an austere life. This was partly because they felt the need to live as the poorest of their people, and partly because they strictly followed the Prophet’s example. During his caliphate, Abu Bakr was offered a glass of cold water to break his fast during Ramadan. He brought the glass to his lips and suddenly began to weep. When asked why, he answered: “One day, the Messenger drank such a glass of cold water offered to him and wept. He said that God says: ‘On that day, you will be questioned concerning every bounty.’ We will be questioned about this water. I remembered that and wept.” [4]

In the early days of his Caliphate, Abu Bakr earned his living by milking a woman’s sheep. Some time later, he was given a small salary. While on his death-bed, he gave a pitcher to those around him and asked them to give it to the new caliph after his death. ‘Umar succeeded him and, when he broke the pitcher, some coins came out, together with the following letter: “I lived according to the living standards of the poorest of Madina, and put in this pitcher the amount left of my salary. Therefore, these coins belong to the public treasury and must be returned there.” On reading the letter, ‘Umar wept and remarked: “O Abu Bakr, you have left an unbearable burden on your successors.”

The Messenger was, in the words of Anas, “the most comely and generous person.” Jabir ibn Samura reports: “Once we were sitting in the mosque, and a full moon was shining above us. The Messenger entered. I looked first at the moon and then at his face. I swear by God that the Messenger’s face was brighter than the moon.” [5]

The Messenger never refused anyone and, as Farazdak said, only said the word “no” when reciting the profession of faith while praying. Once, a bedouin came and asked the Messenger for something. The Messenger complied with his request. The bedouin continued to ask, and the Messenger continued to give until he had nothing left. When the bedouin asked again, he promised that he would give it to him when he had it. Angered by such rudeness, ‘Umar said to the Messenger: “You were asked and you gave. Again you were asked and you gave, until you were asked once more and you promised!” ‘Umar meant that the Messenger should not make things so difficult for himself. The Messenger did not approve of ‘Umar’s words. ‘Abd Allah ibn Hudafa al-Sahmi stood up and said: “O Messenger, give without fear that the Owner of the Seat of Honor will make you poor!’ Pleased with such words, the Messenger declared: “I was commanded to do so!”

He never refused a request, for it was he who said: “The generous are near to God, Paradise, and people, but distant from the Fire. The miserly are distant from God, Paradise, and people, but near to the Fire,” and: “O people! Surely God has chosen for you Islam as religion. Improve your practice of it through generosity and good manners.” His mercifulness rose up as moisture into the sky, and then rained as generosity so that hardened hearts would be fertile enough to grow “good trees whose roots are firm and whose branches are in the Heavens, and which yield their fruits every season by the leave of their Master.” (8)

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[2] Ibn Hisham, 4:135; Ibn Hajar, al-Isaba, 2:187; Muslim, “Fada’il,” 57.
[3] Bukhari, “Tafsir,” 2; Muslim, “Talaq,” 31.
[4] Muslim, “Ashriba,” 140; Abu Nu’aym, “Hilya,” 1:30.
[5] Suyuti, al-Khasa’is, 1:123; Hindi, Kanz al-‘Ummal, 7:168.