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“Pessimism: Its Dangers and Remedy”

Indeed, all praise is due to Allah. We praise Him, seek His help, and ask Him for forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and from the consequences of our deeds. Whoever Allah guides, none can misguide; and whoever He allows to stray, none can guide. I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah alone, with no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

“O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims (in submission to Him).” (Aal `Imran 3:102)

O Muslims!

Among the requirements of sound faith and complete belief in the Oneness of Allah is that a person should avoid everything that may undermine his faith and religion, weaken his belief in Allah’s Oneness, or diminish his certainty. One of the practices of the pre-Islamic era that our true religion abolished, and from which our noble Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, warned us, is pessimism and the belief in omens. Such beliefs cause a person to turn his heart toward something other than Allah in seeking what he desires or avoiding what he fears.

The disbelievers of the past used to take omens from birds. If a bird flew to the right, they would regard it as a good omen and proceed with what they intended to do. If it flew to the left, they would consider it a bad omen and refrain from what they had planned. If a crow landed on one of their houses, they would become fearful and expect something bad to happen.

Servants of Allah!

Pessimism takes many forms and appears in various ways. A person may regard a particular number as unlucky, such as the number thirteen, as some Christians do. He may also regard a particular person as a bad omen, saying, “So-and-so brings bad luck. Every time I travel with him, such-and-such happens to me.” Others may say expressions such as, “May it be good, O bird,” believing that the appearance or sound of a bird may indicate what is about to happen.

All of this is prohibited. Good can come only from Allah, the Mighty and Sublime. He alone possesses all goodness, and to Him all affairs ultimately return.

Pessimism is one of the ways in which Satan instills fear and whispers into a person’s heart. It involves attaching the heart to something other than Allah and having negative assumptions about Him. The person who practices such beliefs has come to believe that something besides Allah can bring benefit or cause harm. Therefore, it is obligatory to resist such beliefs and eradicate their roots—especially since the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, described belief in omens as a form of shirk (idolatry) and warned the Ummah against it.

Ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: “Taking omens is polytheism; taking omens is polytheism.” (Related by Ahmad and Abu Dawud, Al-Albani graded it Sahih)

Paying attention to the bad omen is one of the forms of pessimism. Taking omens was also among the characteristics of the disbelievers who opposed the messengers. When the people of Pharaoh suffered a calamity or drought, they claimed that their misfortunes were caused by the bad omen of Moses and those who followed him. Allah, the Exalted, says:

“And if a bad (condition) struck them, they saw an evil omen in Moses and those with him.” (Al-A`raf 7:131)

Allah refuted them, saying: **“Unquestionably, their fortune is with Allah.”** (Al-A`raf 7:131)

That is, whatever affliction befell them was by Allah’s decree and will, because of their disbelief, sins, and rejection of Moses (peace be upon him). Allah then described most of them as ignorant: **“But most of them do not know.”** (Al-A`raf 7:131)

As for believers who affirm the Oneness of Allah, they are deeply protective of the purity of their belief in His Oneness and strongly reject anything that compromises it.

A bird once passed by making a sound, and a man said, “Good, good.” Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) immediately objected, saying: “There is neither good nor evil in it.” He hastened to correct the man so that he would not come to believe that the bird had any influence over good or evil.

Brothers and Sisters in Islam!

Belief in omens may sometimes arise in the heart without a person consciously intending it. A person may feel pessimistic about something without deliberately choosing to do so. Almost no one is completely free from such passing thoughts. If this happens, a person should not pay attention to them. Rather, he should proceed with what he intended to do, placing his trust in his Lord and relying upon Him with both hope and fear. Such thoughts will not harm him.

He should also say what the Prophet (peace be upon him) instructed: “When any of you sees anything which he dislikes, he should say: ‘O Allah! You Alone bring good things; You Alone avert evil things, and there is no might or power but in You).’” (Abu Dawud with Sahih Isnad)

As for the person who sees or hears something he dislikes and, because of it, abandons what he intended to do out of pessimism, he has committed a prohibited act and fallen into a grave sin. He should hasten to repent to Allah, the Exalted.

`Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) reported that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever turns back from something due to seeing an omen, he has committed idolatry.” They said, “O Messenger of Allah, what is the expiation for that?” The Prophet said, “That he says: O Allah, there is no good but Your good, no omen but Your omen, there is no God besides You.” (Ahmad with Sahih Isnad)

Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Muslim to beware of these false beliefs and to warn others against them. The person who gives in to pessimism has severed his reliance upon Allah and attached his heart to something imaginary. Rather, he should place his trust in his Lord, in Whose Hand are the keys to all affairs, and he should never allow such illusions and superstitions to prevent him from pursuing what he needs or intends to do.

May Allah bless me and you through the great Qur’an, and may He benefit me and you through its verses and wise reminders.

I say these words of mine, and I seek Allah’s forgiveness for myself and for you from every sin. I repent to Him. Indeed, He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

The Second Sermon

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds, and may peace and blessings be upon the noblest of the Messengers, our Prophet Muhammad, and upon his family and all his Companions.

To proceed,

I advise you and myself to fear Allah, the Exalted. Whoever fears Allah, He will protect him, preserve him, and grant him refuge.

Servants of Allah!

There is a distinction between pessimism and optimism. Pessimism is shirk (idolatry) and is prohibited, whereas optimism is good and encouraged. Pessimism reflects having negative assumptions about Allah, the Most High, while optimism reflects having good expectations of Him, Mighty and Majestic. The Muslim is commanded to maintain good expectations of Allah, the Most High, in all circumstances.

Optimism means that a person undertakes something, or resolves to do it, while placing his trust in Allah. Then, when he hears a good word that pleases him, it increases his enthusiasm and encourages him to move forward with what he has set out to do. His heart feels at ease, and he is filled with happiness.

For example, he may see someone whose name has a good meaning and take it as a positive sign, hoping for blessings on that day.

Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “There is no infection and there are no bad omens, although I am pleased by a good omen - a good word.” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

During the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, Suhayl Ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with him)—who at that time was a disbeliever—came to the Prophet (peace be upon him). The Prophet (peace be upon him) took optimism from his name— The name Suhayl comes from a root that means 'easy' —and said: “Your matter has been made easy for you.” (Reported by Al-Bukhari from Ikrimah)

Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “There is nothing of shirk in being pleased with a good omen or appreciating it. Rather, this reflects the natural inclination and innate disposition of human beings toward what suits them, agrees with them, and benefits them.”

Therefore, have good expectations of your Lord and place your trust in Him in all your affairs. Beware of having negative assumptions about Allah, the Exalted, for all that He decrees is good. And whoever becomes attached to something will be entrusted to it: **“Upon him I have relied, and to Him I return.”** (Hud 11:88)

O Allah, suffice us with what You have made lawful instead of what You have forbidden, and enrich us by Your grace so that we need no one besides You.

O Allah, make faith beloved to us and beautify it in our hearts. Make disbelief, wickedness, and disobedience hateful to us, and make us among those who are rightly guided.



O Allah, honor Islam and the Muslims, humble shirk and those who practice it, and grant victory to Your religion, Your Book, the Sunnah of Your Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and Your believing servants.

O Allah, forgive the Muslim men and women, and the believing men and women, those who are living and those who have passed away.

O Allah, guide our Amir and his Crown Prince to what pleases You, and enable them to act in obedience to You and in pursuit of Your pleasure. Make this country safe and secure, prosperous and flourishing, a land of safety and faith, and grant the same to all the Muslim lands.

(Committee for preparing the model sermon for Friday Prayer.)