

TALES OF THE WISE

Selections from *Kitab al-Adhkiya* by Imam Ibn al-Jawzi

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1 WISDOM OF THE PROPHETS

- 1.1 Ibn ‘Abbas said: When Ishmael (peace be upon him) was in his youth, he married a woman from (the Arabian tribe of) Jurhum. Abraham (peace be upon him) came to visit him but his son was out earning his living, so he asked his daughter-in-law about their living conditions. (She did not know who he was.) She replied, “We are in a bad state, conditions are tight and severe,” and complained much. Abraham said, “When your husband returns, convey my greeting of peace to him and tell him that I would like him to change his threshold.” When Ishmael returned, his wife conveyed the message. He said, “That was my father, and he has ordered me to separate from you. Return to your family.”¹
- 1.2 On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said: Two women went out, each with one child. A wolf devoured one of the children, and they disputed about the other (each claimed the remaining child as her own). They referred the matter to David (peace be upon him), who ruled in favour of the elder woman. They then passed by Solomon (peace be upon him), who said, “Bring me a knife, that I may cut the child in half and divide him between you.” The younger woman cried out, “Don’t do that! I give my half to her!” Solomon replied, “Then he is your son,” and ruled in her favour. (Bukhari & Muslim)
- 1.3 On the authority of Muhammad b. Ka’b al-Qurazi, who said: A man came to the Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) and complained, “O Prophet of Allah! One of my neighbours keeps stealing my geese, and I do not know who it is.” Solomon ordered the call to prayer and addressed the congregation. During his sermon he said, “One of you steals his neighbour’s geese and then comes to pray with feathers all over his head!” Upon hearing this, one of the audience wiped his head. Solomon said, “Seize him, for he is the thief!”
- 1.4 It is reported from Jesus (peace be upon him) that the Devil came to him and said, “Do you not think that only Allah’s Decree will come to pass upon you?” He

¹ This hadith is transmitted by Imam Bukhari. Imam Ibn al-Jawzi adds that this story illustrates the wisdom of both Ibrahim (Abraham) and Isma’il (Ishmael).

replied, “Yes, that is so.” He said, “Then throw yourself off this mountain, for if safety is decreed for you, you will survive.” Jesus replied, “O accursed one! It is for Allah, Mighty and Magnificent, to test his slaves. It is not for the slave to test his Lord!”

- 1.5 On the authority of ‘Ali: When the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) proceeded to Badr, we found two men from Quraysh there. One of them escaped, but we seized the other. We kept asking him about the size of the Makkan army and he kept answering, “By Allah, they are large in number and extremely strong!” We beat him every time he said this and then brought him to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) who asked him the same question, to which he gave the same answer. The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) tried to extract an accurate figure from him but the man remained stubborn. Finally, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) asked him, “How many camels do they slaughter?” He replied, “Ten, daily.” The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “The army is a thousand strong: each camel suffices a hundred soldiers.”
- 1.6 On the authority of ‘Abu Hurayrah: A man complained to the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), “I have a neighbour who keeps causing me harm.” He said, “Go home and empty your possessions onto the street.” When he did that, people crowded around him, asking him what happened. He told them that he had complained to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) about his neighbour, and that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) had ordered them to do this. The people began saying about the neighbour, “May Allah curse him! May Allah humiliate him!” This reached the neighbour, who said, “Return to your house, for by Allah, I will not harm you again.”
- 1.7 On the authority of al-Husayn: A man came to the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) with the killer of his relative, so the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) asked him, “Will you accept the diyah (blood-money)?” He replied, “No.” He asked, “Will you then forgive him?” He replied, “No.” He said, “Then go and kill him (in retaliation)!” When the man left, the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, “If he kills him, he will be like him!” A person reported this to the man, who was leading the murderer with a leash around his neck. Upon hearing this, the man set the killer free.²

Ibn Qutaybah commented: The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) did not mean that the man will be like him in sin and deserving the Fire, for killing in retaliation is allowed by Allah. However, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) disliked retaliation and loved forgiveness, so he

² This story is transmitted in *Sahih Muslim*.

said these words so that the man would think that they would be equal in sin and thus spare his life. However, what the Prophet meant was that both of them would have taken a life and thus they would be like each other, even though the murderer would have been a transgressor and the other would have been taking retaliation.

- 1.8 ‘Aishah was asked, “Did the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) ever joke?” She replied: Yes. There was once an old woman with me, who asked the Prophet (SAWS), “Pray to Allah that He makes me among the People of the Garden.” He replied, “The Garden is not to be entered by old women.” He then heard the call to prayer and went out to pray. When he returned, he found the woman weeping. He asked, “What is the matter?” They said, “You told her that the Garden is not to be entered by old women.” He said, “Allah will transform them into young, loving virgins.”
- 1.9 A woman came to the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) complaining about her husband. The Prophet asked, “Is he the one with the whiteness in his eye?” She returned and caringly looked at her husband’s eyes (thinking the whiteness to be a symptom of disease). He asked her what the matter was, and she told him about the Prophet’s question. The man said, “Aren’t the whites of my eyes larger than the dark sections?”
- 1.10 Anas b. Malik reported: A man came to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), asking him for a mount. He said, “I shall give you a camel’s child.” The man said, “O Messenger of Allah, what will I do with a camel’s child?” He replied, “Do any but camels give birth to camels?”

2 WISDOM OF THE COMPANIONS

- 2.1 It is reported from Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him): When the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) made the sacred migration, he would ride with Abu Bakr seated behind him. Abu Bakr knew the routes due to his frequent journeys to Syria. When they passed by anyone, the people would ask, “Who is this sitting in front of you, O Abu Bakr?” He would reply, “A guide, who shows me the way.”
- 2.2 When Ibn Muljam (the killer of ‘Ali, may Allah be pleased with him) was brought to al-Hasan b. ‘Ali, the murderer said, “I wish to whisper a secret into your ear.” Al-Hasan refused, saying, “He wishes to bite my ear.” Ibn Muljam said, “By Allah, had I had the chance, I would have torn his whole ear off!”

- 2.3 Al-‘Abbas (RAA) was asked, “Are you greater (older) than the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace)?” He replied, “He is greater than me, although I was born before him.”
- 2.4 Mujahid narrated that once the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) was with his Companions when he smelled a bad odour. He said, “Whoever has broken wind should get up and make ablution,” but the person was shy. He repeated his words, adding, “... for Allah is not shy of the truth.” Thereupon, Al-‘Abbas said, “Should we not all get up and make ablution?” A similar incident is reported involving the Caliph ‘Umar; in that case, Jarir b. ‘Abdullah made the same suggestion.
- 2.5 Abu Bakr travelled on a trade journey, a year before the death of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), to Busra with Nu’ayman b. ‘Amr and Suwaybit b. Harmalah, both of whom had taken part in Badr. They were also given to playing practical jokes.

Nu’ayman was in charge of the provisions for the journey. One day, Suwaybit asked him for food whilst Abu Bakr was not with them but his friend refused, saying, “Only when Abu Bakr returns.” Suwaybit said, “I will have my revenge!”

They passed by some people, to whom Suwaybit said, “Will you buy one of my slaves?” When they agreed, he said, “This slave talks a lot, and he will say that he is a free man. When he says that, ignore him.” So they bought Nu’ayman for ten young she-camels and tied a turban or rope around his neck. Nu’ayman said, “This man is playing a joke on you. I am a free man, not a slave!” They replied, “He told us about you,” and took him away.

When Abu Bakr returned, he found out what had happened so he went after those people, returned the camels to them and brought Nu’ayman back. When they returned to Madinah, they told the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and his Companions about the incident. They all laughed heartily.³

Translator’s note: *Nu’ayman b. ‘Amr was an Ansari Companion who would joke a lot and make the Prophet and his Companions laugh. He would often take food from the market on credit and bring it to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) as a gift. When the seller demanded payment, he would bring him to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) saying, “Please give him the price of his goods.” The Prophet would say, “Did you not give it to me as a gift?” He would reply, “By Allah, I did not have the money to pay for it, but I wished that you could eat it.” The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) would laugh and order that the seller be paid for his goods. Nu’ayman was*

³ This story is transmitted by Imam Ahmad in his *Musnad* and by Imam Ibn Majah in his *Sunan*. Busayri and Albani said that the *isnad* is weak.

one of the bravest champions of the Ansar, and took part in Badr, Uhud, Khandaq and all the other major battles. He passed away during the caliphate of Mu'awiyah, circa 41 H.

- 2.6 A man came to Mu'awiyah's doorman and said, "Tell him that his brother, from both his father and mother, is at the door." Mu'awiyah said, "I do not know him, but let him enter." When the man entered, Mu'awiyah said, "Which brother are you?" The man replied, "The son of Adam and Hawwa' (Eve)." Mu'awiyah instructed that the man be given a dirham, upon which the man said, "You give your brother, from both your father and mother, only a dirham?" Mu'awiyah replied, "Were I to give money to all my brothers from Adam and Eve, you would not get this much!"
- 2.7 'Umar b. al-Khattab appointed al-Mughirah b. Shu'bah as ruler over Bahrayn (Eastern Arabia), but its people disliked him. He was later appointed elsewhere, but the people of Bahrayn feared that he would be appointed over them once again. One of them had an idea to prevent this from happening. He collected a hundred thousand dirhams from his people and took the money to 'Umar, saying, "Mughirah embezzled this amount from the treasury and entrusted it to me for safe-keeping." 'Umar summoned Mughirah and demanded an explanation. Mughirah replied, "He is lying: it was actually two hundred thousand." 'Umar asked, "What led you to this?" He replied, "Poverty and need." 'Umar asked the man, "What do you say (i.e. where is the rest of the money)?" The man was thus forced to admit that he was lying.

3 WISDOM OF THE CALIPHS AND THEIR MINISTERS

- 3.1 'Abdul Malik b. Marwan dispatched al-Sha'bi as his ambassador to the Byzantine emperor, who was extremely impressed with the envoy. He asked al-Sha'bi if he was from the ruling family, and was told that he was not. When it was time for al-Sha'bi to return to Damascus, the emperor entrusted him with a parchment containing a message for the caliph, to be delivered after he had been briefed about their conversations. After Sha'bi had recounted everything to the caliph, he gave him the parchment. 'Abdul Malik read the message: "I am amazed at the Arabs that they do not make this ambassador their king!" 'Abdul Malik told Sha'bi, "He wishes to make me jealous of you, and provoke me to kill you." Sha'bi replied, "Were he to see you, Chief of the Believers, he would not think highly of me." The incident reached the emperor, who admitted that 'Abdul Malik was right.

4 CHAPTER 15: THE CLEVERNESS OF THIEVES

4.1 *The Learned Robber*

Al-Mubarrid said: Ahmad b. al-Ma'dil of Basra said: I was sitting with 'Abdul Malik b. 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Majishun when one of his companions entered, saying, "Incredible!" He was asked what happened, so he narrated his story:

I travelled out of the city to my distant orchard. Whilst I was in the desert, far from the houses of Madinah, a robber appeared and demanded my robe.

I said, "Why should I give you my robe?"

He replied, "I have more right to it than you."

"Why?"

"Because I am your brother. I have no clothes, but you do."

"Can we discuss this?"

"No! You have worn it for a while, and now I wish to wear it as you have worn it."

"You wish to strip me and expose my private parts?"

"There is no harm. We have transmitted from Malik that he said, 'There is no harm in a man bathing naked'." (i.e. A man may be naked whilst alone.)

"The people will meet me and see me naked."

"If there were any people on this route, I would not have accosted you here."

"You seem to be a reasonable man. Let me proceed to my orchard, where I will disrobe and have the garment sent to you."

"Never! You only want to send me your men to take me to the governor, who will imprison me, flog me and chain me by the ankles."

"No. I swear to you, oath upon oath: I will fulfil my promise and not disappoint you."

"No! We have transmitted from Malik that he said, 'Oaths made to robbers are not binding'."

"Then I swear that I will not violate this oath by exploiting a legal loophole."

"This is a compound oath made to a robber."

“Let’s stop debating. By Allah, I will have this robe sent to you out of my own good will.”

The man lowered his head for a while, then raised it, saying, “Do you know what I was thinking?”

“No.”

“I was thinking about the situation of robbers from the time of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) until today. I have never heard of a robber taking items with deferred delivery (*nasi’ah*), and I dislike to introduce an innovation into Islam for which I will incur its sin and the sin of all who follow it after me until the Day of Resurrection. Remove your robe.”

So I removed my robe and gave it to him, and he took it and went on his way!