

*With the Name of Allah, All-Merciful, Most Merciful*

## **WISDOM & FOLLY – Islamic Texts**

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**Translation of the Qur'an adapted from Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali**

### **Themes of the Texts**

The Meccan surah named after Luqman the Wise is the obvious choice on the nature of wisdom. It begins with “A. L. M.” and is largely devoted to God and His names and works of creation. The passage about Luqman is especially eloquent and a favourite for public reciters.

“The Cow” begins with “A. L. M.” and a mention of the revelation itself and devotes the next four ayat to a description of the righteous, followed by two ayat about the outright rejecters of faith. These are followed by thirteen ayat about the hypocrites or dissimulators, of which the first eleven are selected here because they include the theme of folly. A second passage from the same surah is given that also describes a type of folly.

“The Heights” begins with “A. L. M. S.” and is a long surah that begins with the story of Adam, Satan and Eve, followed by a majestic passage on the Garden, Fire and the Greatness of God and the beauty of His creation. Next comes a long passage, from which the initial part only is given here, which recounts the stories of various Prophets, highlighting the similarity of their message and of the reaction from their communities. The longest such story comes last and is that of Moses and Pharaoh, the most oft-told story in the Qur'an.

### **Points to Consider**

1. Who was Luqman the Wise? Is there a comparable figure in the Torah or Gospel?
2. What is the nature of the fools and the folly in Texts 2-4 ?

**Text 1: Surah *Luqman* (Chapter: Luqman, 31:12-19), Meccan**

**12.** We bestowed (in the past) Wisdom on Luqman: “Show gratitude<sup>1</sup> to Allah.” Any who is (so) grateful does so to the profit of his own soul: but if any is ungrateful, verily Allah is Independent of all wants, Worthy of all Praise.

**13.** Behold, Luqman said to his son by way of instruction: “O my son! join not in worship (others) with Allah; for false worship<sup>2</sup> is indeed the highest wrong-doing.”

**14.** And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in hardship upon hardship did his mother bear him, and in two years was his weaning: (that you hear the command), “Show gratitude to Me and to your parents: to Me is (your final) Goal.

**15.** “But if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to me (in love): in the end the return of you all is to Me, and I will tell you the truth (and meaning) of all that ye did.”

**16.** “O my son!” (said Luqman), “If there be (but) the weight of a mustard-seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, Allah will bring it forth: for Allah understands the finest mysteries, (and) is well-acquainted (with them).

**17.** “O my son! establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong: and bear with patient constancy whatever befalls you; for this is firmness (of purpose) in (the conduct of) affairs.

**18.** “And swell not your cheek (out of pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for Allah loves not any arrogant boaster.

**19.** “And be moderate in your pace (of walking), and lower your voice; for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Shukr*, from the root SH-K-R.

<sup>2</sup> *Shirk*, from the root SH-R-K.

**Text 2: Surah *al-Baqarah* (Chapter: The Cow, 2:8-18), Medinan**

**8.** Of the people there are some who say: "We believe in Allah and the Last Day;" but they do not (really) believe.

**9.** Fain would they deceive Allah and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves, and realise (it) not!

**10.** In their hearts is a disease; and Allah has increased their disease: And grievous is the penalty they (incur), because they are false (to themselves).

**11.** When it is said to them: "Make not mischief on the earth," they say: "Why, we only want to make peace!"

**12.** Of a surety, they are the ones who make mischief, but they realise (it) not.

**13.** When it is said to them: "Believe as the others believe:" They say: "Shall we believe as the fools believe?" Nay, of a surety they are the fools, but they do not know.

**14.** When they meet those who believe, they say: "We believe;" but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: "We are really with you: We (were) only jesting."

**15.** Allah will throw back their mockery on them, and give them rope in their trespasses; so they will wander like blind ones (to and fro).

**16.** These are they who have bartered Guidance for error: but their traffic is profitless, and they have lost true direction,

**17.** Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So they could not see.

**18.** Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not return (to the path).

**Text 3: Surah *al-Baqarah* (Chapter: The Cow, 2:142-5)**

**142.** The fools among the people will say: “What has turned them from the Qibla to which they were used?” Say: To Allah belong both East and West: He guides whom He wills to a Way that is straight.

**143.** Thus, have We made of you a Nation<sup>3</sup> justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves; and We appointed the Qibla<sup>4</sup> to which you were used<sup>5</sup>, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels (from the Faith). Indeed it was (a change) momentous, except to those guided by Allah. And never would Allah make your faith of no effect. For Allah is to all people Most surely full of Kindness, Most Merciful.

**144.** We see the turning of your face (for guidance to the heavens: now shall We turn you to a Qibla that shall please you. Turn then your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque<sup>6</sup>: Wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction. The People of the Book know well that that is the truth from their Lord. Nor is Allah unmindful of what they do.

**145.** Even if you were to bring to the people of the Book all the Signs (together), they would not follow your Qibla; nor are you going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If, after the knowledge that has reached you, you were to follow their (vain) desires, then you would indeed (clearly) be in the wrong.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ummah*

<sup>4</sup> the direction faced during prayers.

<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem, the first Qibla of the Prophet and his followers.

<sup>6</sup> i.e. the Sanctuary at Mecca.

**Text 4: Surah *al-A'raf* (Chapter: The Heights, 7:59-72), Meccan**

**59.** We sent Noah to his people. He said: "O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god but Him. I fear for you the punishment of a dreadful day!"

**60.** The leaders of his people said: "Ah! we see you evidently wandering (in mind)."

**61.** He said: "O my people! No wandering is there in my (mind): on the contrary I am an apostle from the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds!"

**62.** "I but fulfil towards you the duties of my Lord's mission: Sincere is my advice to you, and I know from Allah something that you know not."

**63.** "Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord, through a man of your own people, to warn you, so that you may fear Allah and haply receive His Mercy?"

**64.** But they rejected him, and We delivered him, and those with him, in the Ark: but We overwhelmed in the flood those who rejected Our signs. They were indeed a blind people!

**65.** To the 'Ad people, (We sent) Hud<sup>7</sup>, one of their (own) brethren: He said: O my people, worship Allah! You have no other god but Him. Will you not fear (Him)?"

**66.** The leaders of the Unbelievers among his people said: "Ah! we see you are an imbecile<sup>8</sup>!" and "We think you are a liar!"

**67.** He said: "O my people! I am no imbecile, but (I am) an apostle from the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds!"

**68.** "I but fulfil towards you the duties of my Lord's mission: I am to you a sincere and trustworthy adviser."

**69.** "Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own people, to warn you? Call in remembrance that He made you inheritors after the people of Noah, and gave you a stature tall among the nations. Call in remembrance the benefits (you have received) from Allah, that so you may prosper."

**70.** They said: "Do you come to us, that we may worship Allah alone, and give up the cult of our fathers? Bring us what you threaten us with, if it be so that you tell the truth!"

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<sup>7</sup> An Arabian Prophet whose people lived in Yemen. There exists a shrine in Yemen that is claimed to be that of the Prophet Hud, and is the venue for passionate Sufi celebrations.

<sup>8</sup> Or "fool."

**71.** He said: "Punishment and wrath have already come upon you from your Lord: do you dispute with me over names which you have devised - you and your fathers,- without authority from Allah? Then wait: I am amongst you, also waiting."

**72.** We saved him and those who adhered to him by Our mercy, and We cut off the roots of those who rejected Our signs and did not believe.

## Commentary

### Luqman

The proverbial wisdom of Luqman is striking, and there is the obvious word-contrast at the beginning of the passage between *Shukr* (Gratitude) and *Shirk* (Polytheism), a theme that is also found with regard to Abraham in “The Bee,” 16:120-1.

Who was Luqman? Abdullah Yusuf Ali, author of probably the best-loved English translation of the Qur’an, identifies him with Aesop, the Greek sage. There are three stories or morals in Aesop’s fables that are echoed in the Qur’an and Sunnah:

- 1) Aesop’s moral, “A hypocrite deceives no-one but himself.” Cf. Qur’an 2:9 in Text 2 above.
- 2) Aesop’s moral, “If you feel no shame, do as you wish.” The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, in an authentic hadith, “Truly, one of the teachings that people in the words of the early Prophets was, ‘If you feel no shame, do as you wish’.” Therefore, according to this hadith, Aesop was an early Prophet or transmitted wisdom from earlier Prophets.
- 3) Aesop’s fable of the wise man who was bitten by an ant and so burnt the whole colony of ants, for which he was reprimanded. In the Prophet Muhammad’s retelling of this story, the wise man was a Prophet of God who was reprimanded by God with the words, “Because an ant bit you, you destroyed an entire nation of creatures that worshipped Me?”

Apart from this passage, probably the most often-quoted ayah about wisdom is “He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and he to whom wisdom is granted, receives indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will grasp the Message but people of understanding.” (The Cow, 2:269, again an “A. L. M.” surah)

### The Cow

The fools in Text 2 are the hypocrites, outwardly members of the Muslim community but inwardly rejecters of true faith. They accuse true believers of folly but are the true fools; their folly being their shallow faith and their delusion that they can deceive God and the believers.

The fools in Text 3 are People of the Book who do not understand the importance of symbolism and the inner meaning of rituals such as facing a particular direction in prayer. These verses remain a scathing criticism of Jews, Christians, Muslims and others who reduce religion to empty outward practices devoid of spiritual passion and love for God.

### The Heights

The Prophets are accused of being fools, but they are the truly wise.

**APPENDIX: TALES OF THE WISE - Selections from *Kitab al-Adhkiya*’ by Ibn al-Jawzi<sup>9</sup>** (Translation by Usama Hasan)

## **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 the threshold of his door.” 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.”<sup>10</sup>
- 1.2 On the authority of Abu Hurayrah, that the Messenger of Allah (may God 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!” Sulayman 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 Satan came to him and said, “Do you not think that only Allah’s Decree will come to pass upon you?” He replied,

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<sup>9</sup> Imam Ibn al-Jawzi was a Hanbali scholar of Baghdad, known for his expertise in Law, Tradition and Admonition. He died in 597 / 1201. He wrote a sister book to “Tales of the Wise,” i.e. “Tales of the Fools,” including stories of Juha. Juha in the Arab world and Hoja (Mulla) Nasruddin in Turkey are the main “wise fools” of the Islamic tradition, but there is no such figure in the Qur’an.

<sup>10</sup> In the hadith, the story continues that Ishmael married again into another tribe and Abraham returned later for a similar visit. His new daughter-in-law mentioned that conditions were similarly severe, but she praised God and was content with what she had. Abraham asked her to convey the message to Ishmael to “keep the threshold to his door,” so he kept her as his wife. Ibn al-Jawzi comments that this story illustrates the wisdom of both Abraham and Ishmael.

“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 God bless him and grant him peace) proceeded to Badr<sup>11</sup>, 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 Meccan 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 God bless him and grant him peace) who asked him the same question, to which he gave the same answer. The Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) tried to extract an accurate figure from him but the man remained stubborn. Finally, the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) asked him, “How many camels do they slaughter?” He replied, “Ten, daily.” The Messenger of Allah (may God 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 God 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 God bless him and grant him peace) about his neighbour, and that the Prophet (may God 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 God bless him and grant him peace) with the killer of his relative, so the Prophet (may God 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 God 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.

Ibn Qutaybah commented: The Messenger of Allah (may God 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 God bless

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<sup>11</sup> A desert plain between Mecca and Medina, scene of the first military battle in Islamic history. A Muslim army of 313 men from Medina led by the Prophet Muhammad defeated a Meccan polytheist army over a thousand strong. Several Meccan leaders were killed in the Battle of Badr, which was a decisive event in early Islam.

him and grant him peace) disliked retaliation and loved forgiveness, so he 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 God bless him and grant him peace) ever joke?” She replied: Yes. There was once an old woman with me, who asked the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace), “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 God bless him and grant him peace) complaining about her husband. The Prophet asked, “Is he the one with the whiteness in his eye?”<sup>12</sup> 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 God 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 (God be pleased with him): When the Messenger of Allah (may God 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.”

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<sup>12</sup> Either the Prophet (peace be upon him) was simply joking or, as is more likely, this humour had a psychological impact by making the woman forget her superficial complaints against her husband and value his deeper qualities which she was taking for granted.

- 2.2 When Ibn Muljam (the killer of ‘Ali, God 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 (God be pleased with him) was asked, “Are you greater (older) than the Prophet (may God 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 Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khattab 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, Jarir b. ‘Abdullah said, “Should we not all get up and make ablution?”
- 2.5 Abu Bakr travelled on a trade journey, a year before the death of the Prophet (may God 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 God bless him and grant him peace) and his Companions about the incident. They all laughed heartily.

[Nu’ayman b. ‘Amr was a Medinan Companion of the Prophet 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 God bless him and grant him peace) as a gift. When the seller demanded payment, he would bring him to the Prophet (may God 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 God bless him and grant him peace) would laugh and order that the seller be paid for his goods. Nu’ayman was 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 the doorman of Mu'awiyah<sup>13</sup> 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 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<sup>14</sup> (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<sup>15</sup> dispatched Sha'bi<sup>16</sup> as his ambassador to the Byzantine emperor, who was extremely impressed with the envoy. He asked 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

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<sup>13</sup> Sixth Caliph of Islam who fought a divisive war against the fourth caliph, 'Ali. Mu'awiyah was also the effective founder of the first major dynasty in the Caliphate, the Umayyads, whose capital was Damascus.

<sup>14</sup> Nowadays known as Al-Ahsa', an eastern province of (Saudi) Arabia. The classical Bahrayn was close to, but different from, the two islands off its coast known as modern-day Bahrain.

<sup>15</sup> A major Umayyad caliph of the first Islamic century, revered for his nobility and courage. All four of his sons served as caliph after him.

<sup>16</sup> Sha'bi was a traditionist and scholar who learnt directly from several of the Prophet's Companions. His illustrious students included Imam Abu Hanifah, founder of the earliest of the four major Sunni schools of law.

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.

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## **Chapter 15: The Cleverness of Thieves**

Al-Mubarrid said: Ahmad b. al-Ma’dil of Basra said: I was sitting with ‘Abdul Malik b. ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Majishun<sup>17</sup> when one of his companions entered, saying, “Incredible!” He was asked what happened, so he narrated his story:

I traveled out of the city to my distant orchard. Whilst I was in the desert, far from the houses of Medina, 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<sup>18</sup> 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.”

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<sup>17</sup> A member of a famous traditionist, scholarly family of Medina.

<sup>18</sup> Known as the “Imam of Medina,” one of the early great traditionists and founder of the traditionalist Maliki legal school in early Sunni Islam.

“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 God bless him and grant him peace) until today. I have never heard of a robber taking items with deferred delivery, 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.”<sup>19</sup>

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

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<sup>19</sup> A learned robber, indeed. He uses a legal technical term for deferred delivery, and also refers to the Prophet’s teaching that “Whoever sets a good example in Islam will attract the reward of everyone who follows that example until the Day of Judgment, without their reward being reduced. Whoever sets a bad example in Islam will incur the sin of everyone who follows that example until the Day of Judgment, without their sin being reduced.”