

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Fleeing from the Decree to the Decree
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DURING TIMES of uncertainty, the believer turns to the texts of Islam for guidance and reassurance. And as the current COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread—and claim lives—we turn to the narrations of the *Salaf*, particularly the story of ‘Umar b. al-Khattab’s journey to Sham. This journey took place during the plague of ‘Amwas, a virulent epidemic that eventually spread to several regions, including Egypt and Iraq, killing tens of thousands of people. As the companions contemplated entering Sham, the epicenter of the outbreak, they were reminded of a tradition from our beloved Prophet (ﷺ):

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، أَنَّ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ . رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ . خَرَجَ إِلَى الشَّامِ حَتَّى إِذَا كَانَ بِسَرْعَ لَقِيَهُ أَمْرَاءُ الْأَجْنَادِ أَبُو عُبَيْدَةَ بْنُ الْجَرَّاحِ وَأَصْحَابُهُ، فَأَخْبَرُوهُ أَنَّ الْوَبَاءَ قَدْ وَقَعَ بِأَرْضِ الشَّامِ. قَالَ ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ فَقَالَ عُمَرُ ادْعُ لِي الْمُهَاجِرِينَ الْأَوَّلِينَ. فَدَعَاهُمْ فَاسْتَشَارَهُمْ وَأَخْبَرَهُمْ أَنَّ الْوَبَاءَ قَدْ وَقَعَ بِالشَّامِ فَاحْتَلَفُوا. فَقَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ قَدْ خَرَجْتَ لِأَمْرٍ، وَلَا نَرَى أَنْ تَرْجِعَ عَنْهُ. وَقَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ مَعَكَ بَقِيَّةُ النَّاسِ وَأَصْحَابُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ وَلَا نَرَى أَنْ تُقَدِّمَهُمْ عَلَى هَذَا الْوَبَاءِ. فَقَالَ ارْتَفِعُوا عَنِّي. ثُمَّ قَالَ ادْعُوا لِي الْأَنْصَارَ. فَدَعَوْهُمْ فَاسْتَشَارَهُمْ، فَسَلَكُوا سَبِيلَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ، وَاحْتَلَفُوا كَاخْتِلَافِهِمْ، فَقَالَ ارْتَفِعُوا عَنِّي. ثُمَّ قَالَ ادْعُ لِي مَنْ كَانَ هَا هُنَا مِنْ مَشِيخَةٍ قُرَيْشٍ مِنْ مُهَاجِرَةِ الْفَتْحِ. فَدَعَوْهُمْ، فَلَمْ يَخْتَلِفْ مِنْهُمْ عَلَيْهِ رَجُلَانِ، فَقَالُوا نَرَى أَنْ تَرْجِعَ بِالنَّاسِ، وَلَا تُقَدِّمَهُمْ عَلَى هَذَا الْوَبَاءِ، فَنَادَى عُمَرُ فِي النَّاسِ، إِنِّي مُصَبِّحٌ عَلَى ظَهْرٍ، فَأَصْبَحُوا عَلَيْهِ. قَالَ أَبُو عُبَيْدَةَ بْنُ الْجَرَّاحِ أَفَرَارًا مِنْ قَدَرِ اللَّهِ فَقَالَ عُمَرُ لَوْ غَيْرَكَ قَالَهَا يَا أَبَا عُبَيْدَةَ، نَعَمْ نَفَرٌ مِنْ قَدَرِ اللَّهِ إِلَى قَدَرِ اللَّهِ، أَرَأَيْتَ لَوْ كَانَ لَكَ إِبِلٌ هَبَطَتْ وَادِيًا لَهُ غَدَوَتَانِ، إِحْدَاهُمَا حَصْبَةٌ، وَالْأُخْرَى جَدْبَةٌ، أَلَيْسَ إِنْ رَعَيْتَ الْحَصْبَةَ رَعَيْتَهَا بِقَدَرِ اللَّهِ، وَإِنْ رَعَيْتَ الْجَدْبَةَ رَعَيْتَهَا بِقَدَرِ اللَّهِ قَالَ فَجَاءَ عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ عَوْفٍ، وَكَانَ مُتَعَبِّيًا فِي بَعْضِ حَاجَتِهِ فَقَالَ إِنَّ عِنْدِي فِي هَذَا عِلْمًا سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ بِهِ بِأَرْضٍ فَلَا تَقْدُمُوا عَلَيْهِ، وَإِذَا وَقَعَ بِأَرْضٍ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا فَلَا تَخْرُجُوا فِرَارًا مِنْهُ. قَالَ فَحَمِدَ اللَّهُ عُمَرُ ثُمَّ انْصَرَفَ.

Ibn ‘Abbas reported that ‘Umar bin Al-Khattab departed for Sham, and when he reached Sargh,¹ the commanders of the army, Abu ‘Ubaydah b. Al-Jarrah and his companions, met him and told him that an epidemic had broken out in Sham. ‘Umar said, “Call the early emigrants for me.” So ‘Umar called them, consulted them, and informed them that an epidemic had broken out in Sham. They differed in their opinions. Some said, “You have come out for a purpose, and we do not think it proper to abandon it,” while others said, “You have others along with you, and the companions of Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ), so do not take them to [the place of] this epidemic.” ‘Umar said to them, “Leave me now.” Then he said, “Call the Ansar for me.” I called them, and he consulted them, and they followed the way of the emigrants, differing as they had. He said to them, “Leave me now,” and added, “Call the elders of Quraysh for me, who emigrated in the year of the Conquest of Makkah.” I called them, and they gave a unanimous opinion saying, “We advise you to return with the people and do not take

¹ Ibn Abd Al-Barr stated that this was a valley near Tabuk. It was a rest stop for pilgrims coming from Sham, as stated by Al-Hazimi; see *Fath al-Bari* [Ahmad B. Hajr, *Fath Al-Bari*, vol. 10 (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah), 194.]

them into this epidemic.” So, ‘Umar made an announcement, “I will ride back to Madinah in the morning, and you should do the same.” Abu ‘Ubaydah b. Al-Jarrah said [to ‘Umar], “Are you fleeing from what Allah has decreed?” ‘Umar said, “If only someone else had said this, O Abu ‘Ubaydah. Yes, we are fleeing from what Allah has decreed *to* what Allah has decreed. Don’t you agree that if you had camels that went down a valley having two sides, one green and the other dry, that you would graze them on the green side only if Allah had decreed that, and you would graze them on the dry side only if Allah had decreed that?” At that time, ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Auf, who had been absent taking care of some need, came and said, “I have some knowledge concerning this. I heard Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) say, ‘If you hear about [an outbreak of plague] in a land, do not go to it; and if plague breaks out in a land in which you are residing, do not leave from it.’” ‘Umar praised Allah and returned to Madinah.²

To take stock of this narration and apply it to the current crisis, one must examine it closely:

First, the narration teaches us to proceed cautiously in the face of a potentially harmful situation. After hearing of an outbreak in Sham, ‘Umar did not advance hastily. Instead, he sought counsel from the Companions of Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ), calling the early emigrants, the Ansar, and the elders from Quraysh. And only after consultation and contemplation did he come to a decision.

Next, it teaches us to consult the people of knowledge and to give precedence to the elders among them, putting everyone in their proper place. Allah says,

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“Ask the people of knowledge when you don’t know.” [*al-Nahl* 16:43]

And the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

البركة مع أكابرکم

“Blessings are with your elders.”³

Therefore, in these difficult days, we look to the wisdom of our elder scholars, the likes of *Shaykh* Salih al-Fawzan, et al., who have advised us with caution and prudence during this trial. Conversely, we must be careful not to place our health and well-being in the hands of the ignorant and uniformed. For the ignorant have nothing to offer but rumors, conspiracy theories, and snake oil remedies. Are we not aware of the Prophet’s (ﷺ) statement?

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَمْ يُنْزِلْ دَاءً إِلَّا أَنْزَلَ لَهُ شِفَاءً عِلْمُهُ مَنْ عِلْمُهُ وَجْهَلُهُ مَنْ جْهَلُهُ

“Allah never sent down a disease except that he sent down its cure. Those who know it, know it, and those who are ignorant of it are ignorant.”⁴

And certainly, the person of sound mind looks to those who know. Allah says,

² Collected by Bukhari (no. 5729) and Muslim (no. 2219).

³ Collected by Ibn Hibban (no. 1912) and authenticated by al-Albani in *al-Sahihah* (no. 1778)

⁴ Collected by Ahmad in his Musnad (no. 3568) and authenticated by al-Albani in *al-Sahihah* (no. 451) on the authority of ‘Abd Allah b. Mas’ud.

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Say, ‘Are those who know equal to those who do not know?’” [al-Zumar 39:9]

Next, the narration directs us to seek the means of subsistence. But as the scholars explain, ‘Umar did not intend that by returning to Madinah, he could avoid Allah’s Decree. Rather, he made this decision because Allah has commanded us to avoid perilous situations.⁵ As Ibn Hajr states, “Avoiding what is harmful has been legislated.”⁶ So, he was not fleeing from Allah’s Decree. He was fleeing from a potentially harmful situation, making the choice between reliance (*tawakkul*) and taking precautions (*tamassuk bi al-Asbab*).⁷ Concerning this choice, al-Allamah Abd al-Aziz b. Baz stated,

Al-Tawakkul comprises two matters: First, depending upon Allah and believing that He determines all affairs; second, seeking the means of survival, and there is no reliance without it. Whoever negates this has contradicted Allah’s Legislation...as Allah and His Messenger have prescribed seeking the means of subsistence. So, it is impermissible for the believer to disregard this, as one has not truly depended upon Allah without doing so. Thus, Allah legislated marriage and intimacy to produce children. So, if a person said, ‘I will not marry [or be intimate] and will wait for a child,’ he would be considered insane. This is not sensible. Likewise, a person should not sit at home or in the masjid waiting for provisions. Rather, it is obligatory upon him to work and earn his livelihood.

Maryam did not neglect seeking sustenance. Allah said to her,

وَهَزَىٰ إِلَيْكَ يَجْدَعِ النَّخْلَةَ تُسْقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رَطْبًا جَنِيًّا

“And shake the trunk of date-palm towards you, it will let fall fresh ripe-dates upon you.” [Maryam 19:25]

She shook the tree and sought the means of subsistence until the dates fell. Thus, she did not neglect seeking sustenance...⁸

We find similar to this in the narration of Anas b. Malik:

قَالَ رَجُلٌ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَعْقِلْهَا وَأَتَوَكَّلُ أَوْ أَطْلُقْهَا وَأَتَوَكَّلُ قَالَ أَعْقِلْهَا وَتَوَكَّلْ

“A man said to Allah’s Messenger, ‘Should I tie [my camel] and rely [upon Allah] or leave it untied and rely [upon Him]?’ The Prophet said, ‘Tie it and rely [upon Allah].’”⁹

Al-Muhaddith al-Mubarakfuri said that “rely” means to depend upon Allah; “this is because tying your camel does not contradict *tawakkul* (reliance).”¹⁰ It is, in truth, essential to one’s reliance upon Allah. So, taking precautions like wearing face masks, washing hands, and social distancing, etc. are prudent,

⁵ Yahya Sharaf Al-Nawawi, *Al-Minhaj Sharh Sahib Muslim b. Al-Hajjaj*, vol. 14, 370.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ahmad b. Hajr, *Fath Al-Bari*, vol. 10 (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah), 194.

⁸ ‘Abd al-Aziz b. Baz, “Ahammiyah al-Tawakkul wa al-Akhduh bi Al-Asbab” (Binbaz.org.sa, n.d.), accessed 4th Rabi II, 1442 AH/November 20, 2020.

⁹ Collected by al-Tirmidhi in *al-Jami’* (no. 2517) and graded *hasan* by al-Albani in *Sahih al-Tirmidhi* (no. 2517).

¹⁰ Muhammad b. Abd al-Rahman al-Mubarakfuri, *Tuhfah Al-Ahwadhi*, vol. 7 (Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 186.

desirable actions in the teeth of one of the deadliest pandemics in modern memory. Taking these safety measures does not contradict reliance upon Allah. On the contrary, it is “tying one’s camel.”

Next, the narration clarifies the prohibition of entering or leaving a land that has been afflicted by an epidemic. *Shaykh* Ibn Baz states,

If an epidemic breaks out in a land, do not enter it. If it breaks out in Sham, in Egypt, or elsewhere, do not enter it. However, if it breaks out in the land in which you are residing, be patient with Allah’s Decree. One’s lifespan has been determined. One cannot hasten it or delay it. Allah says,

أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدْرِكُكُمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشِيدَةٍ

“Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you should be within towers of lofty construction.” [*al-Nisa* 4:78]

However, the people have been ordered to seek the means of survival.¹¹

Moreover, when asked if this narration applied to other diseases, like cholera, *Shaykh* Ibn Baz responded in the affirmative, as long as “it breaks out in a land and is known to infect the people like a plague.”¹²

Finally, when we gain such knowledge and receive Allah’s Mercy, we should thank and praise Him, as ‘Umar did upon discovering that his decision was in accordance with the Prophet’s (ﷺ) *Sunnah*. After ‘Abd al-Rahman b. ‘Auf related the hadith, “‘Umar praised Allah and returned to Madinah.”

We ask Allah to protect us from all harm and danger, to heal the sick among us, and to have mercy on our dead. Indeed, Allah has power over all things.



¹¹ “Ahammiyah al-Tawakkul wa al-Akhdhu bi Al-Asbab,” ‘Abd al-Aziz b. Baz

¹² Ibid.